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## **Learning Inter-professional Teamwork during University Studies: A Case Study of Student Teachers' and Social Work Students' Shared Professional Experiences**

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## **Inter-professional Teamwork during University Studies: A Case Study of Student Teachers' and Social Work Students' Shared Professional Experiences**

This paper explores ways of enhancing inter-professional skills as part of professional development during university studies. From a socio-psychological viewpoint, inter-professional teamwork can be regarded as an interface between the group and individual levels, where collective commitment, efficiency, shared processes and outcomes, as well as tensions and dilemmas, are brought together. Inter-professional skills, which are already practised in university, may enable professionals to work in inter-professional contexts during their careers. In this case study, the participants (three student teachers, two social work students and four supervisors) reflected on their shared experience of participating in a shared practicum at a primary school. The data set comprises two group interviews conducted separately with the students and supervisors following the practicum. The results indicate that it is possible to develop inter-professional competencies during one's university studies and that this has the potential to promote students' reflective skills as they reframe their expertise and the expertise in other professions.

Key words: inter-professional teamwork, school welfare, university studies, professional experience

### **Introduction**

In schools, teachers work with social workers, other professionals and parents. Therefore, teacher education is aimed at promoting future teachers' understanding of themselves as collaborators and promoters of learning and well-being (Watkins and Donnelly 2012). In many countries, there are guidelines requiring schools to support pupils by providing special education arrangements and student welfare services, which are planned and executed by inter-professional teams. For example, in Finland, the *Act on Pupil and Student Welfare* (1287/2013) and the amendments to the *Finnish National Core Curriculum* (Amendment 3/3/2014) stress developing communal and preventive methods for student welfare. These reforms require the school community to support pupils' mental, physical and social welfare

through co-operation among professionals. Similarly, in the United States, inter-professional teamwork is required to cater to all children in mainstream classes (Dobbs-Oates and Wachter Morris 2016).

However, universities do not offer sufficient opportunities for pre-service teachers to develop collaborative skills with other professionals (Dobbs-Oates and Wachter Morris 2016). Thus, newly qualified teachers know little about the work involved in other professions.

Nevertheless, teachers need the experience of working with other professionals during their initial teacher education. The skills that they can acquire from such experience will allow them to emphasise a shared team identity and focus on creating integrative knowledge and practices across professional boundaries (Anderson 2013; Edwards 2011).

The importance of promoting inter-professional teamwork and education has been outlined clearly in the literature on healthcare and social work, where inter-professional education has had a positive impact on students' knowledge, skills and attitudes (Davis et al. 2015).

Specifically, scholars have discussed inter-professional courses and programmes in the healthcare field, in which students have learnt with, from and about other professions (Ruebling et al. 2014). In addition, many studies have investigated co-operation between social work and healthcare professionals aimed at improving child care provision (Floyd and Morrison 2014).

While such studies have provided relevant knowledge of the elements of inter-professional teamwork in general, few of them have described inter-professional practices involving teachers (Floyd and Morrison 2014). For instance, in exploring the social work demands in 15 primary schools, Webb and Vulliamy (2002) uncovered that teachers help with parenting,

support pupils with emotional and behavioural problems and work with agencies to deal with many issues. Consequently, they highlighted the need for training in inter-professional skills. Baginsky and Macpherson (2005) surveyed child protection courses in initial teacher education in England and Wales and discovered that after completing the courses, student teachers were still unsure about their competencies in confronting child protection in their work. Moreover, Anderson (2013) reported on a pilot study in which early childhood education and social work students participated in inter-professional and collaborative activities as part of their coursework. The results showed that discipline-specific understanding created barriers to communication. Further, several challenges were identified, such as a lack of clarity around each other's professional roles and responsibilities and differences in understanding children's behaviour. Edwards, Lunt and Stamou (2010) explored inter-professional teamwork on various occasions in schools and found that preventative work on social exclusion in schools was difficult to implement in a collaborative manner, since it demands relative agency within practitioners' boundaries, as well as constant and flexible group decision-making.

The present case study has potential to contribute to the literature on student teachers' inter-professional competencies, even though the sample was small, and thus the results have to be evaluated critically. For instance, most newly graduated teachers claim that they are unprepared for the reality of a regular classroom, including meeting the needs of diverse learners and working in inter-professional teams (Forlin 2010). The present study investigated the learning processes of three student teachers, two social work students and four supervisors in a collaborative practicum at a primary school. The research questions were as follows: (1) How did the students and supervisors experience the practicum? (2)

What were the participants' perceptions of the process of developing inter-professional skills?

The contributions of the authors were divided. The first author conducted the study with the supervisors, collected the data and analysed it. The second author contributed to the analysis and writing process, but was not involved in the actual research. The supervisors (authors 3, 4, 5 and 6) acted as reflective practitioners; they planned, supervised and documented their professional experience. Due to ethical reasons, they are also authors of this paper; without their contribution, it would have been impossible to conduct this study. The analysis of this case study was a continuum in which the supervisors participated as experts through reflective groupthinking before, during and after the practicum.

### **Inter-professional Teamwork**

A profession includes specific values, knowledge and vocabulary, and a high degree of autonomy. The hallmarks of professionalism in general are having expertise in a certain area and following a professional code of ethics (Frelin 2013). Inter-professional teamwork can be regarded as a boundary practice between different types of expertise. This draws attention to the various cultures across professional borders (Rose and Norwich 2014). Besides the community level, inter-professional teamwork functions at the individual level through socio-emotional and knowledge dimensions. Different professional views may create tension and dilemmas around professional roles (Maisey 2011). Similarly, teamwork may involve feelings of uncertainty and a sense that the tasks have become unclear, and contradictory work cultures and different versions of knowledge may cause problems (Rose and Norwich 2014). These can be termed 'critical accidents', and they need to be explicated,

conceptualised and translated into practical knowledge, so they can become valuable learning experiences (Maisey 2011).

When the relationships between professionals are positive, this fosters reciprocity in helping, accepting and liking each other (Maisey 2011). According to Dobbs-Oates and Wachter Morris (2016), respecting others and understanding all professional roles is a basic value behind inter-professional actions. In addition, Edwards (2012) indicates that by listening to and interpreting each other's stories and tacit knowledge, changes in team members' ideas and in professional identities may occur. Therefore, when it is successful, inter-professional teamwork can create interdependence among professionals.

### **Reflective Practitioners as Inter-professional Team Members**

Reflective thinking means moving towards critical practice and argumentation (Thompson and Thompson 2008). It can be compared to open-minded thinking, where people are willing or able to change perspectives and consider alternative opinions (Sá, West and Stanovich 1999). Becoming a reflective practitioner is a demanding process which requires guided reflective actions, for example, during initial professional education (cf. Körkkö, Kyrö-Ämmälä and Turunen 2016). The problem in 'teaching' reflective thinking is that educators cannot focus on mechanical experiences but, rather, on subjective experiences, as valid evidence of learning (Eaton 2016).

Reflective thinking is especially required in inter-professional teamwork, where the tacit knowledge shared within one profession must become visible, so that the members of other professions can access it. Practical theories consisting of private personal knowledge, values, attitudes, beliefs and experiences – as well as theoretical and philosophic-ethical elements

(Levin and He 2008; K rkk  et al. 2016) – must be explicit to oneself and shared with team members from different professions. Thus, developing one’s inter-professional practical theory requires communication between the partly implicit personal elements and conscious theoretical elements (Stenberg 2011). This is made possible by reflective conversations among team members (Pence and Macgillivray 2008).

Learning to be a member of an inter-professional team can occur during the initial training in stages of reflection. The process starts with descriptive reflection (Jay and Johnson 2002), setting a problem that the team members need to solve. At first, it may appear shapeless. After identifying emotions and thoughts relating to the problem, it is put into a framework (Sch n 1983). Framing the experience allows team members to compare different questions relating to the problem. Jay and Johnson (2002) referred to this phase as comparative reflection. Inter-professional teamwork is often associated with tension and hurdles, but it is important to recognise that conflicts between concrete experiences and analytic discussions are innate to the learning process (Rose and Norwich 2014). If team members can create an atmosphere in which their dilemmas manifest, they can reach a transformation point at which they can understand the problem in more general terms – or reframe it through critically reflective analysis (Jay and Johnson 2002). The last phase of the process is planning, during which new solutions are sought and tested.

The reflection process highlights the fact that human actions and interpretations of reality are often illogical and unpredictable by nature (Kinsella 2010). Thus, teaching students to become reflective practitioners requires supervisors encouraging the students to be curious inquirers of their experiences, valuing the subjective nature of reflection and trusting the



students' capacity to draw meaning from their experiences and display it in multiple ways (Eaton 2016).

### **Research Design**

This research is a pilot study. A single-case approach was selected in order to closely examine the case, which was unusual in the sense of its content (Yin 2014): in Finland preventive and community based student welfare work is still looking for a place in everyday school life, especially when implemented through multi-professional co-operation.

### ***Research Setting***

The current study was conducted at Teacher Training School (TTS), a primary school affiliated with the Faculty of Education, University of Lapland. The study was a five-week practicum which was part of the participating students' master programme. Three students were studying in a primary school teacher education programme and two were studying in a social work education programme. The student teachers were completing their final practical training in teaching and the social work students were concluding the first part of their long practical training. The student teachers' practical training focused on developing their ability to take overall responsibility of the classroom and adopt different pedagogical perspectives. Usually, in Finnish comprehensive schools, school social workers offer counselling to students with problems related to going to school, with peers, or when changes in their lives affect their school experiences. Problems can be solved with the help of parents and other adults at the school. Sometimes, multi-professional work with child welfare authorities, family clinics and health care authorities is needed. Here, the focus of the social work students' practical training was on preventive school welfare work at the community level.

They worked at afternoon clubs, in rehabilitative classes and in mainstream classes at TTS. After these five weeks ended, they continued their training elsewhere.

The shared practicum was executed in two primary school classes (years three and four). One student teacher was located in the year three class and two in the year four class; the social work students were involved with both classes. The shared practicum was aimed at the inter-professional implementation of preventive and community based school welfare work in the classroom setting.

The study was part of a European Social Fund project, *Multi-Agency at School*. Two project workers were located at TTS – a primary school teacher and a social worker. During the practicum, the students were supervised by two primary school teachers and the two project workers. The supervisors had two shared planning sessions before the practicum. During the practicum, the students had four tutorials with all supervisors and several reflective discussions with some supervisors, most of whom were from their own profession. In addition, reflective discussions took place every day among the students. After the practicum, the students further processed their experiences and findings in university seminars.

At the beginning of the practicum, the social work students conducted welfare interviews with pupils. Based upon the results of these interviews, the social work students and the student teachers set concrete aims for seven lessons together with the pupils in both classes. They focused on negotiation and social interaction by creating board games and short animations on themes such as ‘How to solve mobbing problems’, ‘How to help friends’ and ‘How to reconcile disputes’. During the lessons, the pupils worked towards achieving these concrete goals while simultaneously practising them. After the lessons, the pupils provided

written feedback and an evaluative discussion took place. The feedback was positive; furthermore, the pupils' skills had improved and they had begun solving disagreements by negotiating among themselves.

The students' participation in the study was voluntary; they had the opportunity to sign up for the shared practicum if they were interested. The supervisors also volunteered to participate. Signed informed consent was collected from the students and supervisors prior to the commencement of the study.

### ***Data Collection and Analysis***

At the end of the practicum, separate group interviews were conducted, with the students in one group and the supervisors in the other. This was to ensure free expression in both focus groups. These two groups provided different angles of the process, thereby enhancing the reliability of the data. The groups provided information as a team, and the configuration enabled the participants to compare diverse opinions and provide arguments to support their opinions (Gibbs 2012). During the interviews, experiential knowledge was communicated and fresh propositions were made (Heron and Reason 2001). The interviewer sought to be sensitive, create a safe atmosphere and ensure that multiple perspectives and points were represented (Zeichner 1994). The interviewer also emphasised that this was the first time the practicum had been carried out and, accordingly, how valuable critical feedback would be.

The themes for discussion were given to the participants in advance. During the interviews, the students considered how they had understood the goals of the practicum, how the implementation had succeeded and what kinds of outcomes they had attained. They also reflected on their experiences of the interactions and the distribution of the work within the

group. The supervisors were given the same themes, but they reflected on both the students' activities and their own supervision during the practicum. The interviews were 81 and 76 minutes in duration with the students and supervisors, respectively, and they were recorded and transcribed (42 pages), including notes on the moods of the speakers and their gestures (Cohen, Mannion and Morrison 2011). The transcripts were stored in a protected digital environment.

The data were analysed using qualitative thematic analysis; themes were identified by conducting a conceptual analysis of the literature on inter-professional competencies (Cohen, Mannion and Morrison 2011) and the reflective process (Schön 1983). To increase the reliability of the results, the views expressed by the two focus groups as different observers were underlined throughout the data analysis (Silverman 2006). Table 1 illustrates the analytical process.

Table 1. An example of data analysis

	PROBLEM	IDENTIFYING	FRAMING	REFRAMING	CONCLUSION
CITATIONS	<i>Interviewer: How did you experience setting goal for the pupils?</i>	<i>Student teacher Julia: It demanded learning from ourselves, too. You can't write it down so clearly --- what kind of learning there is to take place but anyhow, there will be learning and how to make it happen what was planned--- etc.</i>	<i>Student teacher Julia: Well, as a teacher, I missed a concrete goal.-- Social work student Sini: The concrete output was problematic from our point of view. --- etc.</i>	<i>Student teacher Milla: But for us it was, -- we had Sini and Krista [social workers] who all the time emphasized the skills of interaction and so on --- etc.</i>	Team members have diverse competences which enhance the mutual goal. It is possible to learn new things through working with others. → Inter-professional competence
REDUCED PARAPHRASES	Pupils' learning goals, their contents and instruction	How do they instruct negotiation skills and social competences to pupils?	Student teachers missed a concrete, cognitive goal which would appear from the curriculum; social work students shunned working with a concrete task like making animation film.	Student teachers felt relieved when the social work students were able to pick up elements related to social skills training while working with pupils.	

First, comments relating to the same themes were recognised. Then the phases of reflection were identified in order to determine how the reflective process unfolded. Next, the comments were shortened and conclusions were drawn.

The following results are based on participant insights identified during the data analysis. The results are organised in chronological order to reveal the students gradual learning process.

The participants were given pseudonyms and acronyms: SW – social worker student; ST – student teacher; SWS – social worker supervisor; and PSTS – primary school teacher supervisor. The short lines (---) between comments mean that irrelevant text was omitted.

The interviews and data analysis were conducted in Finnish, and the following excerpts were translated into English by the authors.

### **Results: Two Distinct Professions Meet**

During the interview, the students described how, at the beginning, they had not known how to reach goals to work as a team:

Julia (ST): *Well, as a teacher, I missed a concrete goal. Although we had the negotiation skills, social skills and --- It is so deeply embedded in me that there should be a concrete thing in the lesson ...*

Hilda (ST): *...a cognitive goal...*

Sini (SW): *The concrete output was problematic from our point of view. Sometimes we felt that it was difficult to bring our know-how to the process.*

This exemplifies the first phase of reflection: *describing* and *discussing* how to reach the goals (Jay and Johnson 2002). The student teachers wanted to take on a cognitive topic, based on the curriculum, whereas the social work students were uncomfortable doing concrete tasks with pupils. The students had to negotiate the next steps together. Edwards, Lunt and Stamou

(2010) referred to this kind of capacity to work with others as ‘relational agency’: team members are capable of interpreting problems through diverse motives and resources, thus expanding their understanding of the topic itself.

Moreover, the supervisors described not having enough knowledge about inter-professional teamwork, but claimed that they learnt more and developed inter-professional competencies by negotiating with each other:

Helena (PSTS): *I think our collaborative supervising was need-oriented. In a way, we couldn't anticipate what kinds of issues were going to arise. Every time we noticed a thing that didn't work, we discussed it together.*

Noora (SWS): *Yes, it was nice that the interaction between us worked and we were able to discuss the problems. --- I learnt all the time, a great deal.*

Such contradictions have been observed in previous research (Rose and Norwich 2014). The basis of each profession lies in subject knowledge, language, professional identity and roles. In this study, the students noted the difficulties, because of differences between their professional cultures. They identified disparities between the languages they used and between their work cultures:

Julia (ST): *--- It surprised me that social workers and teachers have such different ways of approaching their work. And because you didn't know much – only the basic things about others' work... to combine those worlds, to start speaking the same language.*

As illustrated in the previous excerpt, the students were able to frame these disparities and see beyond the differences (Kelley 2011). The supervisors detected the same kinds of differences and described how they had helped the students become aware of them. The supervisors felt that the students had confronted difficulties in developing teamwork and that they had

overcome feelings of incompetence and inferiority. The practicum offered a safe space for rehearsing competencies:

Helena (PSTS): *--- try to create possibilities to discuss each other's work and to find the similarities and differences. That is a way to reach an understanding of one's work ... and to offer them possibilities to say, 'I need help' or 'What do you say about that?'*

Veera (PSTS): *--- At first, the social work students retreated to the corner, but at the end, they were assertive everywhere in the class. --- Although they all felt anxious: 'No, we don't have enough time'; 'How do we manage this!?' Anyway, the end – the last lesson – it was just so wonderful ... [Veera seems emotional].*

The students realised that both teachers and social workers have their own theoretical frameworks based on their disciplines. They compared the structures of their work and noticed, for example, that teachers need to plan and act quickly to manage the classroom, while social workers require analytic thinking and time for reflection:

Krista (SW): *Maybe the target-oriented and structured approach to working comes up more in individual client meetings. It is a little bit harder to put them into words with a whole class. ---*

Julia (ST): *It is probably common for us teachers that we do things [knocks rhythmically on the board], and we do them quickly, efficiently – done. I do not know if you [social work students] felt that soon after we had opened the laptop and started ... we quickly planned something, and it was done?*

Sini (SW): *Well, yes, it did feel like that! It felt like this is not how it is supposed to go!*

The supervisors were aware of these contradictory feelings and described how they encouraged the students to have confidence in themselves, pointing out their professional strengths. They helped the students frame the incidents of the practicum as follows:

Tanja (PSTS): --- *to give space for the inter-professional teamwork, to the partner who came to the class. We had to discuss many times what each person's role was. We had to consider the strengths from each side, where you can utilise the expertise, in what situations and how. It took a lot of supervising.*

Noora (SWS): *When you are in the class, it easily goes like... well, the student teachers had ownership of the class, so [it affected the students'] physical placement. I told the social work students not to withdraw to the back of the classroom, but to be present with the others. That really changed towards the end.*

Baker et al. (2011) observed that in multi-professional teams, the dominant occupational groups can engage in demarcation strategies to control the boundaries. However, working on inter-professional goals can expose the lack of knowledge of other professions' roles and competencies and skew the hierarchy of relationships towards increased collaboration (Baker et al. 2011).

It was evident that the students, with help from their supervisors, became aware of their lack of knowledge about other professions, which then encouraged them to listen to each other and adopt fresh ways of collaborating, not deploying demarcation strategies. For instance, the student teachers noticed that the social work students knew how to verbalise socio-emotional goals, which were somewhat unclear for them. In turn, the social work students observed that working with concrete tasks helped when engaging with the pupils in natural situations. They began to see new possibilities in their professional identities and competencies. They could also frame problems and identify the elements of their distinct professional roles and knowledge – social workers' knowledge of supporting and enhancing people's social welfare and interactions, and teachers' pedagogical knowledge of working with children:



Milla (ST): *But for us, it was, since we have the background of teachers, we had Sini and Krista [social workers] who all the time emphasised the skills of interaction and so on... because we easily remembered only the cognitive goals.*

Krista (SW): *On the other hand, it was good that those skills were not introduced unconnected [to concrete tasks], as they are skills which cannot be taught like that. Now we, in a way, have created a basis for the process of continuing [to learn those skills].*

As the previous excerpt evinces, the students started to relate their professional skills, demonstrating their comparative level of reflection (Jay and Johnson 2002). Reframing the problems and giving situations new meanings enabled them to distribute the work and responsibilities equally among themselves:

Milla (ST): *Then we began to start and end the lessons together, so that everyone had a certain role in them, and so that there wasn't only one person managing the pupils while the others just stood somewhere.*

Sini (SW): *We actually shared quite a lot of turns speaking.*

Krista (SW): *And that also started like a process: you learnt to take responsibility for your own participation and speaking.*

Hilda (ST): *And, in turn, we learnt to pull ourselves away and give space... You [social work students] were encouraged to take the floor.*

Julia (ST): *It was present all the time. Like, if you pulled yourself away, it was like... you began to learn to do it.*

This passage shows that the student teachers consciously pulled themselves aside and avoided managing the group by themselves, and the social work students noticed that they had to be active and take more responsibility. This can be described as 'distributed expertise', where a continuous process of negotiation allowed the students to construct a boundary space between

their professions to serve their goals. This kind of space offered new possibilities for co-operation, requiring ‘balancing at the boundaries’ (Edwards, Lunt and Stamou 2010). The students started to co-configure the distribution of the work and reached the critical level of reflection, including reframing their own profession and the boundary space between professions.

The students also reframed their professional identities (Schön 1983). The social work students detected the power relations between teachers and social workers, and concluded that they were a ‘minority’ among professionals. However, they felt that their professional identity was strengthened by working together:

Krista (SW): *Overall, I feel that my professional identity has inevitably been strengthened. I have learnt to hold up the voice of social work. That’s not so self-evident in an environment where you belong to a minority [school].*

Interviewer: *So, the student teachers have not overruled you?!*

Krista (SW): *Well, no! [laughing] ---*

Milla (ST): *Now, after the practicum, I have an idea: we [a teacher and a social worker] could work in pairs --- if we worked near each other, we could utilise each other’s strengths. ---*

Thus, the student teachers noticed that they would benefit from working in teams to rely on each other’s professional strengths. Inter-professional teamwork opened their eyes to more natural and inclusive ways of working (Dobbs-Oates and Wachter Morris 2016). This resonates with Edwards (2011), who determined that structuring and using common knowledge is essential to the relational expertise required for working across practice boundaries. The supervisors also pondered the reframing process. One of them said the following:

Helena (PSTS): *From the pupils' point of view, the shared practicum was very successful --- although, among the adults, it was challenging. --- Like, although it was difficult, we tried hard to make it better, because we had a common goal: the children's benefit.*

At a transformation point like this, influenced by the supervisors, the students could reframe the course of events and derive new meanings from their actions and feelings. This is considered an important competency in inter-professional teamwork (Dobbs-Oates and Wachter Morris 2016). Reframing their professional identities meant that the students became aware of their special skills as teachers and social workers – and how they could complement one another.

## **Conclusions**

In this case study the reflective process began with detecting the differences between inter-professional team members, and the supervisors' role was significant at this point. The supervisors were able to describe what and how they want the students to learn. In our study, the supervisors could not anticipate all the problems their students faced. However, Kinsella (2010) argued that the artistry of professional practices is revealed in unique and uncertain situations, which the practicum offered. Owing to the difficulty of creating boundary spaces (Edwards 2011), some degree of confusion and disorientation may be common in inter-professional development, which resonates with previous research (Rose and Norwich 2014). If the process succeeds, members reach a transformation point at which they start to change their behaviour and learn new competencies. However, since inter-professional teamwork is about crossing boundaries, this act may cause insecurity about unsettled ways of co-operating (Edwards, Lunt and Stamou 2010), where there is a possibility of withdrawing to continue undertaking traditional forms of work. Figure 1 displays the entire reflective process.

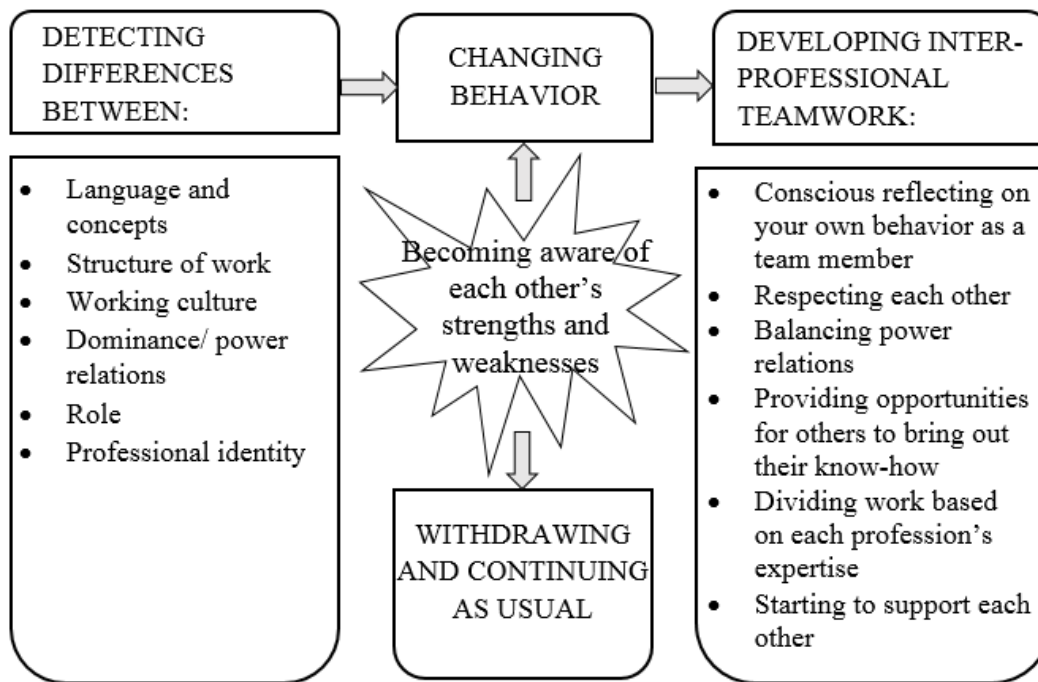


Figure 1. The reflective process

Working in an inter-professional team requires constant reflection. In a successful team, the members respect each other and balance the power relations. Since teachers represent the majority of professionals in schools, they may take their ownership of procedures and activities for granted. Becoming aware and providing space for other professionals enables everyone to bring out their know-how by distributing the work according to expertise. Then gradually, the members start to support each other. At this point, the team has the potential to reach a new level of expertise that its members could not attain alone.

The creation of inter-professional modules in higher education may face some surprising obstacles. In this study, the dissatisfaction was partly due to excessive haste. Both the supervisors and students noted that more time was needed for collaborative reflective discussions before and during the practicum. Another weakness was the number of

individuals involved in the planning, beginning with coordinating schedules. Furthermore, the participants felt that they required elementary knowledge of preventive pupil welfare work and inter-professional teamwork prior to the practicum. Also, the starting point was not the same for all students: the student teachers had an observation and planning period, whereas the social work students did not, and had to begin immediately with pupil welfare interviews. A shared observation and planning period would have given the students more time to get acquainted and strategise. Similarly, in the future, sufficient time marked in the students' schedules will be needed for team-wide reflective sessions.

Moreover, the fact that this was the first time organising an inter-professional education module imposed limitations on the research results. Thus, further studies will be needed to generalise the results. It is also necessary to interpret the results cautiously because of the unique context of the study. In this case study, there may have been accidental circumstances which may not be repeated (Silverman 2006), like the supervisors and students not being accustomed to inter-professional work, which gave the researchers access to fresh soil for learning. Furthermore, the participants were mature enough to perceive their actions critically. In another case, critical incidents might have been hidden. The importance of supervisors' competencies in guiding reflective thinking became inevitable, although the nature of reflective thinking appears in countless variations of professional situations, and thus the dilemma of validating the learning process through subjective experiences remains (cf. Eaton 2016).

One of the concrete outcomes was the identification of the need for a collaborative course for multi-professional work as part of teacher education and social work programmes at the University of Lapland. In addition, this study produced insights about the reflective process

and helped us identify the critical elements of inter-professional teamwork. Therefore, this has the potential to be a template for collaborative work at higher education institutions, which could produce new kinds of professionals, who are not afraid to ask for help, who can listen and take the opinions of others into consideration without losing their own professional identity and who are able to find fresh ways to distribute work.

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